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FACT SHEET

Highest Level of Educational Attainment in South Africa

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1. Background

South Africa's commitment to the development of a skilled and capable workforce is reflected in its National Development Plan (NDP) and strategic plans such as the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF)¹. A proxy measure of the skills and capability of South Africa's workforce is its highest level of education attainment (HLEA). The HLEA is often used globally to compare education levels of people across nations. Such comparisons serve as a barometer of the extent to which countries perform in terms of their education systems and are used by investors to assess investment potential in a country. Moreover, a person's educational attainment is one of the most important determinants of his or her life prospects in terms of employment, income, health status, housing, and many other amenities (Belfield & Levin, 2016)². Barro and Lee (2001)³ state that more years of schooling in the population reflect a workforce that is more highly skilled and productive, leading to improved long-term economic growth and social outcomes.

In the dawn of democracy in 1994, the new government was faced with a huge task of addressing the provisioning of quality education and training. Government had to do this in the context of rebuilding a society ravaged by deep structural inequalities. In 1994, only 1.7 million people had post-matriculation as their highest level of educational attainment, out of which 56% were white, 36% were African, 4% were coloured and 3% were Indian⁴. In 1996, about 3.8 million people out of the total population of 17.1 million aged 26 and above in South Africa had no education; out of which about 3.5 million (93%) were African⁵. The immediate aim in the post-1994 epoch was to turn around a system that had concentrated on providing skills mainly to whites to one which is more inclusive and relevant.

2. Purpose

The information presented in this fact sheet is intended to draw the attention of policy makers to the progress made by the South African education system in terms of the highest levels of educational attainment of the population, including its workforce. It provides signals on how best to balance the provisioning of education at distinct levels of the system and seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What is the highest level of education attainment of South Africa's population, including its workforce?
- What is the profile of those who completed education at numerous levels, disaggregated by race, gender, and age groups?
- How does South Africa compare internationally, in terms of the achievement of literacy and those who have completed degrees?

¹ Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. 2014. Medium Term Strategic Framework 2014-2019. Republic of South Africa.

² Belfield, C.R. and Levin, H.M. (2016). The Education Attainment Gap: Who's Affected, How Much, and Why It Matters. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pricewepay_chapter.pdf

³ Barro, R.J. and Lee, J-W. (2010). A New Data Set of Educational Attainment in the World, 1950 – 2010. Working Paper 15902. National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁴ SAIRR, 1995/96 South Africa Survey, p.97: using data sourced from Central Statistical Service, October Household Survey.

⁵ Africa, A., Budlender, D. and Mpetsheni, Y. 2001. Education in South Africa: Selected findings from Census'96. Statistics South Africa, Pretoria.

3. Terms and Definitions

3.1. Adult

Adults in this fact sheet refers to individuals aged 25-64 years. The reason for selecting this age group is that at this age an individual has at-least completed their first school qualification or highest post-school qualification.

3.3. Highest level of educational attainment

Highest level of education refers to the highest grade completed at school and/or the highest post-school qualification obtained.

3.4. Tertiary education

Tertiary education refers to the following qualifications:

- an undergraduate degree,
- a post-graduate degree,
- a diploma,
- a Higher Certificate (upon completion of matric), and
- an advanced Diploma or advanced Certificate.

3.5. Employed

Persons aged 15–64 years who, during the reference week, did any work for at least one hour.

3.6. Unemployed

There are two definitions of the unemployed: the official definition and the expanded definition.

- (a) According to the official definition, unemployed persons are those aged 15–64 years who:
- (i) were not employed in the reference week; and
 - (ii) actively looked for work or tried to start a business in the four weeks preceding the survey interview; and
 - (iii) were available for work, i.e. would have been able to start work or a business in the reference week; or
 - (iv) had not actively looked for work in the past four weeks but had a job or business to start at a definite date in the future and were available.
- (b) Based on the expanded definition, unemployed persons are those aged 15-64 years who:
- (i) fall under official unemployment (searched and available); and
 - (ii) were available to work but are discouraged work-seekers or have other reasons for not searching for work.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The data sourced from Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) was reported for the periods 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4, while the data sourced from other international sources was reported for different periods for which such data were available. Table 1 presents numbers and shares of persons in the population aged 25-64 years, by highest level of educational attainment for the periods 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4. Between 2010 and 2021, the

number of persons aged 25-64 years in the population increased by 27.8% (6.4 million) from 23.2 million to 29.7 million. For more than a decade since 2010, the largest proportions of adult South Africans in the aforesaid age group are those who had some secondary (less than Grade 12) and secondary education (Grade 12 and equivalent) as their highest levels of educational attainment.

The proportion of those who had some secondary education as their highest level of educational attainment increased by 3.1 percentage points from 36.1% (8.4 million) in 2010 to 39.2% (11.6 million) in 2021. The second largest share had secondary education (Grade 12 or equivalent) as their highest level of education attainment, with the share increasing by 6.5 percentage points from 25.4% (5.9 million) in 2010 to 31.9% (9.5 million) in 2021. Although the number of persons who had a Diploma as their highest level of education attainment increased by over 200 000 over the past decade, their proportion of the 25-64 year old population declined. On the other hand, the proportion of 25-64 year olds who had a degree as a highest level of education attainment, increased by almost 1%, with over 500 000 more people with a degree in the population currently than was the case 10 years ago. Despite this progress though, only less than 6% of South African adults had a degree as their highest level of educational attainment in 2021 – a figure that is far below many other countries, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Table 1: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 years, by highest level of educational attainment, 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4

Highest level of education attainment	2010: Q4		2021: Q4	
	Number	Share	Number	Share
No schooling	1 244 865	5.4%	743 723	2.5%
Less than primary	2 874 446	12.4%	2 077 805	7.0%
Primary	1 389 347	6.0%	1 230 004	4.1%
Some secondary	8 386 298	36.1%	11 614 798	39.2%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	5 906 079	25.4%	9 450 653	31.9%
Certificate	597 955	2.6%	991 085	3.3%
Diploma	1 325 562	5.7%	1 595 123	5.4%
Degree	1 194 823	5.1%	1 747 399	5.9%
Other	288 321	1.2%	205 212	0.7%
Total	23 207 696	100.0%	29 655 802	100.0%

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4.

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE, SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/ Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NC(V) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following groups: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6, and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/PhD).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Table 2 presents the distribution of highest level of educational attainment of persons in the population aged 25-65 years, by gender, from 2010: Q4 to 2021: Q4. The number of males in the population increased by 30.9% (3.5 million) over the past decade, from 11.2 million to 14.6 million, while the number of females increased by 24.9% (2.9 million) from 12.0 million to 15.0 million. In 2021, therefore, the 25-65 aged female population was 2.5% higher than that of males.

In 2021, the HLEA across all levels was fairly similar for males and females, except where a Diploma was the HLEA, where a higher proportion of the female population had diplomas compared to males. In addition, although a higher proportion of the female population had no schooling compared to that of males in 2021, there was a significant reduction in "no schooling" among females over the past decade. Generally, more males relatively had secondary education, while more females had a Diploma, and equal shares of males and females had a degree as their highest levels of educational attainment.

Table 2: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 year olds, by highest level of education attainment and gender, 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4

Highest level of educational attainment	2010: Q4					2021: Q4				
	Male		Female		Total	Male		Female		Total
	Number	Share	Number	Share		Number	Share	Number	Share	
No schooling	473 219	4.2%	771 645	6.4%	1 244 865	302 353	2.1%	441 371	2.9%	743 723
Less than primary	1 362 808	12.2%	1 511 638	12.6%	2 874 446	1 036 492	7.1%	1 041 314	6.9%	2 077 805
Primary	630 718	5.6%	758 630	6.3%	1 389 347	614 790	4.2%	615 214	4.1%	1 230 004
Some secondary	4 003 656	35.8%	4 382 642	36.5%	8 386 298	5 822 084	39.8%	5 792 715	38.6%	11 614 798
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	3 027 976	27.1%	2 878 103	23.9%	5 906 079	4 767 250	32.5%	4 683 403	31.2%	9 450 653
Certificate	313 293	2.8%	284 662	2.4%	597 955	479 058	3.3%	512 026	3.4%	991 085
Diploma	562 755	5.0%	762 806	6.3%	1 325 562	640 635	4.4%	954 488	6.4%	1 595 123
Degree	641 760	5.7%	553 063	4.6%	1 194 823	860 379	5.9%	887 020	5.9%	1 747 399
Other	173 000	1.5%	115 321	1.0%	288 321	123 108	0.8%	82 104	0.5%	205 212
Total	11 189 186	100.0%	12 018 510	100.0%	23 207 696	14 646 149	100.0%	15 009 654	100%	29 655 802

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4.

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE, SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC

I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/PhD).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Table 3 shows that levels of education attainment were lowest among Coloured and Black African population groups. On the other hand, levels of education attainment were highest among Whites, followed by Indians/Asians. In 2021, close to 30% of the White population had a degree, while less than 4% of Coloureds and Black Africans had a degree. However, the actual number of people with degrees as their highest level of education attainment was highest among Black Africans, and lowest among Coloureds, with the number of Black Africans with a degree as their highest level of education attainment having almost doubled over the past decade. In 2021, over 88% of the White population had completed matric, followed by 74% Indians/Asians, 42% Black Africans and 39% Coloureds⁶. Those with no schooling at all and primary schooling as their highest levels of education were highest among the Black African and lowest among the Coloured population groups.

⁶ These figures were obtained by adding all those who had secondary education (Grade 12) and all levels of post-secondary education as their highest level of education attainment

Table 3: Number and share of persons in the population aged 25-64 year olds, by highest level of education attainment and race, 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4

Highest level of education attainment	Black African				Coloured				Indian/Asian				White			
	2010: Q4		2021: Q4		2010: Q4		2021: Q4		2010: Q4		2021: Q4		2010: Q4		2021: Q4	
	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share	'000'	Share
No schooling	1 188	6.7%	682	2.9%	52	2.3%	50	1.9%	4	0.6%	11	1.3%	2	0.1%	-	0.0%
Less than primary	2 577	14.6%	1 855	7.8%	26 0	11.4%	210	7.8%	30	4.3%	9	1.0%	10	0.4%	5	0.2%
Primary	1 160	6.6%	1 031	4.3%	189	8.3%	171	6.4%	32	4.5%	20	2.4%	10	0.4%	8	0.3%
Some secondary	6 845	38.7%	9 996	42.1%	938	41.2%	1 145	43.1%	201	28.5%	176	21.0%	405	15.7%	251	11.0%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	4 011	22.7%	7 467	31.3%	579	25.4%	769	28.8%	295	41.8%	354	42.3%	1 023	39.7%	860	37.0%
Certificate	435	2.5%	809	3.4%	34	1.5%	58	2.2%	12	1.7%	32	3.8%	119	4.6%	92	4.0%
Diploma	772	4.4%	992	4.2%	11 0	4.8%	108	4.1%	44	6.2%	84	10.1%	401	15.6%	410	17.7%
Degree	464	2.6%	816	3.4%	74	3.2%	103	3.9%	76	10.8%	148	17.7%	582	22.6%	680	29.3%
Other	215	1.2%	140	0.6%	42	1.8%	49	1.8%	11	1.6%	4	0.4%	22	0.9%	13	0.6%
Total	17 667	100%	23 788	100%	2278	100%	2 663	100%	705	100%	838	100.0%	2 574	100%	2 319	100%

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4.

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE, SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC

I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(v) Level 4.

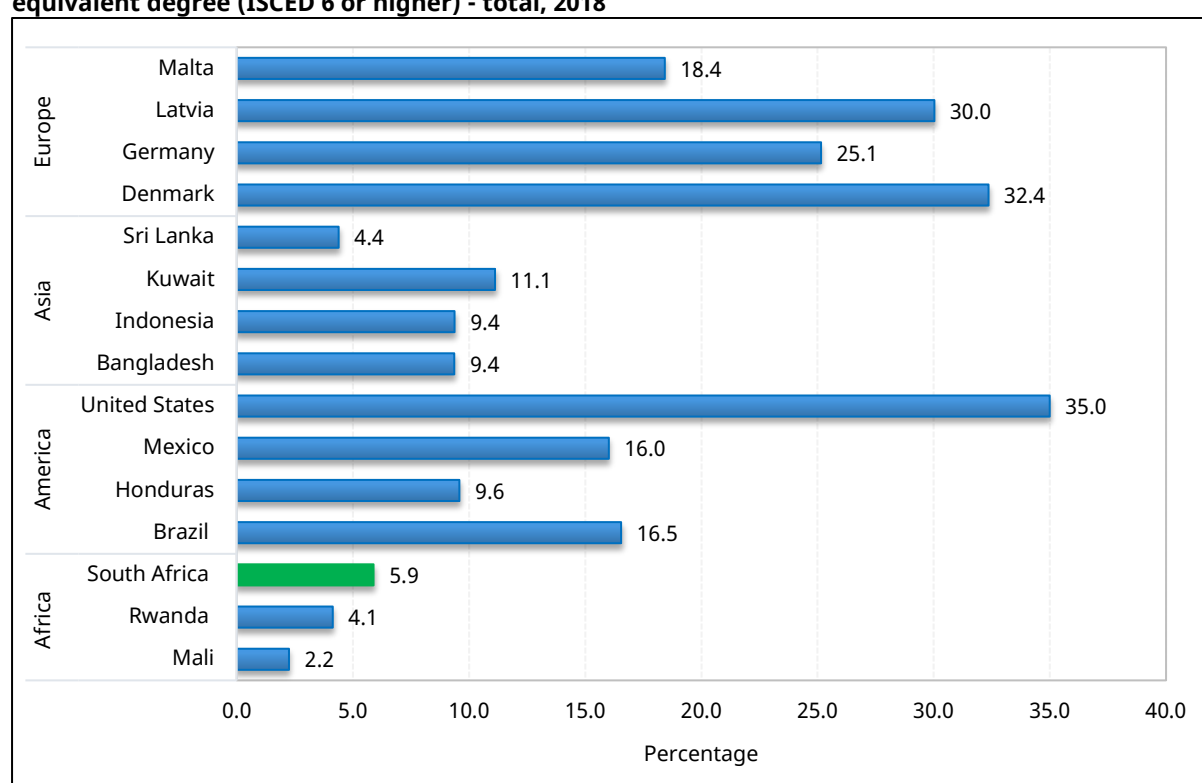
Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/PhD).

Figure 1 compares persons who completed a bachelor's degree relative to the population, across a range of countries based on the figures calculated by and obtained from the World Bank. The graph depicts that the percentage of population aged 25 years and above with at least a completed bachelor's or equivalent degree (ISCED 6) or higher in South Africa was 5.9% in 2018. South Africa's performance was substantially lower than many countries in Europe, Asia and America. Moreover, South Africa's performance was even lower than countries such as Brazil (16.5%), Mexico (16.0%), Kuwait (11.1%), Honduras (9.6%), Indonesia (9.4%), and Bangladesh (9.4%), many of whom have a similar gross domestic product (GDP) to South Africa. South Africa's performance was higher relative to Rwanda (4.1%), Mali (2.2%) and Sri Lanka (4.4%).

Figure 1: Percentage of population aged 25 years and above with at least a completed bachelor's or equivalent degree (ISCED 6 or higher) - total, 2018



Source: World Bank Education Statistics 2020

Notes:

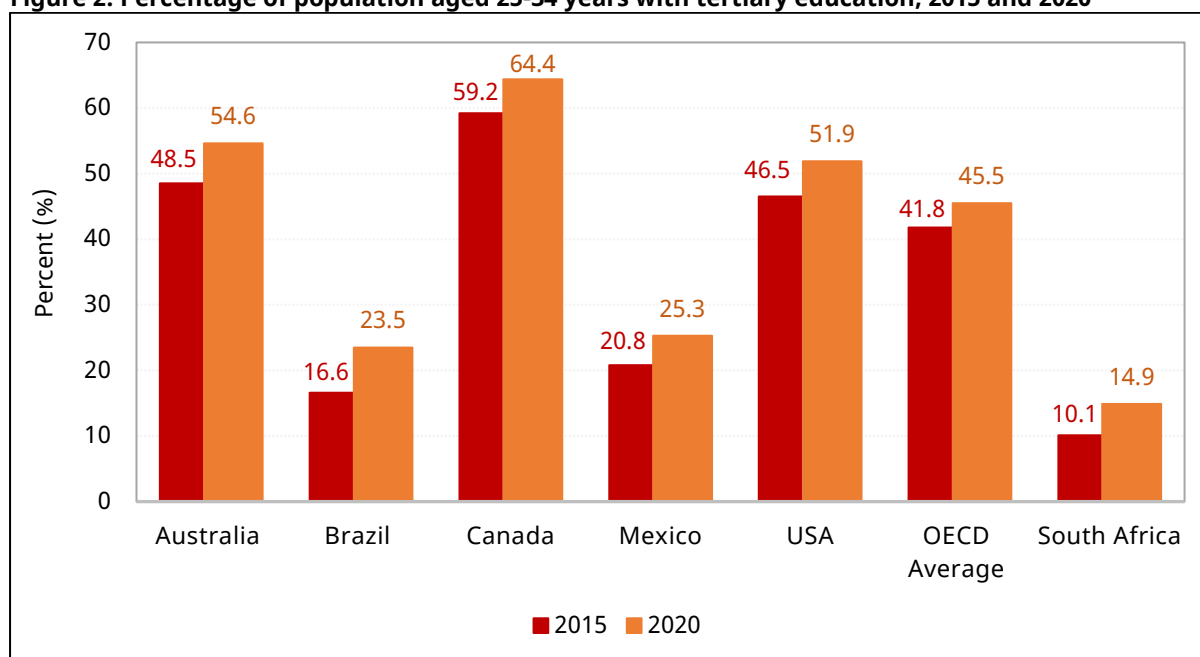
Note 1: Latest data available at the time of producing the report was for the year 2018.

Note 2: The countries included in this Figure were selected based on availability of latest data.

The figure for South Africa was not available in the World Bank (WB) Education Statistics dataset at the time this fact sheet was produced. Accordingly, South Africa's figure reported in Figure 1 was calculated by authors using Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data.

Figure 2 presents the numbers of 25–34-year-olds in the population with tertiary education, expressed as a percentage of the number of persons in the same age group for South Africa, relative to those of selected nations in the world. Between the years 2015 and 2020, South Africa's share of population aged 25–34 years with tertiary education stood at 10.1% and 14.9% in 2015 and 2020, respectively. South Africa's performance was lower than the OECD averages of 41.8% in 2015 and 51.9% in 2020 as well as those of Brazil (16.6% in 2015 and 23.5% in 2020) and Mexico (20.8% in 2015 and 25.3% in 2020).

Figure 2: Percentage of population aged 25-34 years with tertiary education, 2015 and 2020



Source: OECD Education at a glance: Educational attainment and labour-force status 2022

Table 4 shows employment by education level as percentage of 25-64 year-olds across selected nations during 2020. Proportions of persons employed who had below upper secondary (40.1%), upper secondary, non-tertiary (52.6%) and tertiary (72.7%) educational qualifications in South Africa remained much lower than those in other nations (Indonesia, Italy, Brazil and Mexico) and OECD averages. Across all countries and the OECD region, employed persons (as proportions of 25-64 year-olds) increased markedly as educational levels attained progressively became higher.

Table 4: Employment by education level across countries, as percentage (%) of 25-64 year-olds, 2020

Country/region	Below upper secondary	Upper secondary, non-tertiary	Tertiary
OECD average	57.6	75.0	84.5
Brazil	52.1	66.3	79.1
Indonesia	73.5	73.8	82.3
Italy	51.7	70.5	80.8
Mexico	62.6	67.7	76.3
South Africa	40.1	52.6	72.7

Source: OECD (2022), *Employment by education level (indicator)*. doi: 10.1787/26f676c7-en (Accessed on 23 June 2022)

Table 5 shows that the highest proportion of **employed** persons aged 25-64 years had 'some secondary' and 'secondary' (Grade 12 or equivalent) as their highest level of education attainment between 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4. The share of the employed with some secondary increased slightly from 32.5% (4.1 million) to 33.0% (4.5 million). Similarly, the share of employed persons who had secondary level qualification as their highest level of educational attainment increased markedly from 29.2% (3.7 million) in 2010 to 34.0% (4.7 million) in 2021. The share of the employed with a degree increased from merely 8.3% (1.0 million) to 10.0% (1.4 million). It is

significant that the proportion of the workforce with a degree as the highest level of education attainment (at 10%) was higher than the case with the broader population (at 6%).

Table 5: Number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who are employed (official or strict definition), by highest level of educational attainment, 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4

Highest level of education attainment	2010: Q4		2021: Q4	
	Number employed	Share	Number employed	Share
No schooling	394 492	3.1%	209 674	1.5%
Less than primary	1 065 827	8.4%	713 614	5.2%
Primary	617 591	4.9%	416 625	3.0%
Some secondary	4 110 890	32.5%	4 548 177	33.0%
Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent)	3 701 381	29.2%	4 685 953	34.0%
Certificate	433 902	3.4%	576 478	4.2%
Diploma	1 111 788	8.8%	1 142 111	8.3%
Degree	1 049 967	8.3%	1 373 104	10.0%
Other	182 087	1.4%	100 212	0.7%
Total	12 667 925	100%	13 765 947	100%

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4.

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE, SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following classes: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/ Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(V) Level 4

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/PhD).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

Table 6 shows that among persons aged 25-64 years who were **unemployed** in 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4, most of them had 'some secondary' as their highest level of education attainment, whose largest shares changed from 45.9% (1.4 million) to 45.0% (2.9 million). The corresponding rate of unemployment of the respective persons aged 25-64 years with 'some secondary' educational attainment increased by 5.1 percentage points from 9.1% in 2010 to 14.2% 2021.

It is interesting to note that the share of the unemployed aged 25-64 years with a degree stood at 1.0% in 2010 and 2.7% in 2021, with corresponding unemployment rates of 0.2% and 0.8% in the respective periods. This finding is consistent with the finding reported in the DHET (2021:35)⁷ post-school education and training (PSET) monitor report which states that during (2010–2020), higher education attainment levels were correlated with higher employment rates.

⁷ Khukuvhe, M., Netshifhefhe, E., Ganyaupfu, E., and Negogogo, V. (2021). Department of Higher Education and Training. Post-School Education and Training Monitor. Macro-Indicator Trends. Republic of South Africa.

Table 6: Number and share of persons aged 25-64 years who are unemployed (strict definition), by highest level of education attainment, 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4

Highest level of education attainment	2010: Q4			2021: Q4		
	Number unemployed	Share	Unemployment rate	Number unemployed	Share	Unemployment rate
No schooling	79 499	2.5%	0.5%	61 559	1.0%	0.3%
Less than primary	305 234	9.7%	1.9%	304 757	4.8%	1.5%
Primary	156 262	5.0%	1.0%	250 579	3.9%	1.2%
Some secondary	1 439 862	45.9%	9.1%	2 869 968	45.0%	14.2%
Secondary (Grade 12/equivalent)	947 541	30.2%	6.0%	2 237 630	35.1%	11.1%
Certificate	81 032	2.6%	0.5%	235 203	3.7%	1.2%
Diploma	76 142	2.4%	0.5%	219 414	3.4%	1.1%
Degree	30 229	1.0%	0.2%	169 080	2.7%	0.8%
Other	20 139	0.6%	0.1%	30 339	0.5%	0.2%
Total	3 135 938	100%	19.8%	6 378 528	100%	31.7%

Source: Statistics South Africa Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2010: Q4 and 2021: Q4.

Notes:

Note 1: No schooling includes the following categories: No schooling and Grade R/0.

Note 2: Less than primary includes the following categories: Grade 1/Sub A, Grade 2/Sub B, Grade 3/Standard 1/AET 1 (KHARI RI GUDE, SANLI), Grade 4/Standard 2, Grade 5/Standard 3/AET 2, Grade 6/Standard 4.

Note 3: Primary as HLEA refers to Grade 7/Standard 5/AET 3.

Note 4: Some Secondary as HLEA includes the following categories: Grade 8/Standard 6/Form 1, Grade 9/Standard 7/Form 2/AET 4, Grade 10/Standard 8/Form 3, Grade 11/Standard 9/Form 4, NTC I/N1/NIC/(v) Level 2, NTC II/N2/NIC/(v) Level 3, Certificate with less than Grade 12/Std 10 and Diploma with less than Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 5: Secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as HLEA refers to the following categories: Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (No Exemption), Grade 12/Standard 10/Form 5/Matric (Exemption/Bachelor's pass) and NTC III/N3/NIC/(V) Level 4.

Note 6: Certificate refers to the following categories: N4/NTC 4, N5/NTC 5, N6/NTC 6 and Certificate with Grade 12/Std 10.

Note 7: Diploma refers to the following categories: Diploma with Grade 12/Std 10 and Higher Diploma.

Note 8: Degree refers to the following categories: Post Higher Diploma (Masters; Doctoral Diploma), Bachelors Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Honours Degree and Higher Degree (Masters/PhD).

Note 9: Other includes the following categories: Other and Do not know.

5. Conclusion

This fact sheet shows that levels of educational attainment are improving across all population groups in South Africa. In 2021: Q4, the largest share of the population aged 25-64 (39.2%) had some secondary as their highest level of education attainment, followed by 31.9% with secondary (Grade 12 or equivalent) as their highest level of education attainment. The distribution of highest education attainment by population group, however, reveals that Coloured and Black African population groups had lower levels of education attainment than their White and Indian/Asian counterparts. For example, less than 4% of the Black African and Coloured population groups had degrees, while close to 30% of the White population had a degree.

International comparative analysis based on the percentage of population aged 25 years and above with at least a completed bachelor's or equivalent degree (ISCED 6) or higher indicates that South Africa's performance was substantially lower than those of many countries in Europe, Asia and America. Moreover, South Africa's performance was even lower than countries such as Brazil (16.5%), Mexico (16.0%), Kuwait (11.1%), Honduras (9.6%), Indonesia (9.4%), and Bangladesh (9.4%), many of whom have a similar gross domestic product (GDP) to South Africa. Nonetheless, South Africa's performance was higher relative to Rwanda (4.1%), Mali (2.2%) and Sri Lanka (4.4%).

The highest proportion of **employed** persons had 'some secondary' and 'secondary' (Grade 12 or equivalent) as their highest level of education attainment. The share of the workforce with a degree as highest education level (10%) was higher than the case with the broader population (6%). Regarding persons who were **unemployed**, most of them had 'some secondary' as their highest level of education attainment. The share of the unemployed with a degree which stood at 2.7% in 2021, and the analogous unemployment rate of 0.8% in the same period confirm that higher education attainment levels are generally correlated with higher employment rates. These findings suggest the need for government to strengthen policy interventions towards ensuring that the largest shares of the labour force in the population improve their educational attainment levels in order for them to improve their prospects for both employment and income earnings.